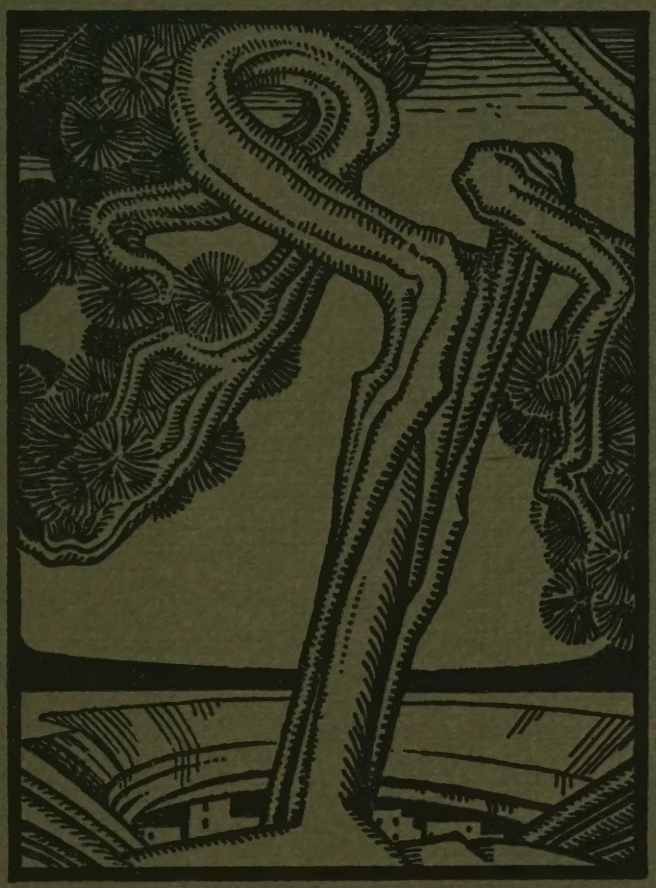
a8b
NH
32
.G489
M57
1927

THE GETTY CENTER LIBRARY

Why ask for the moon
when we have the stars?

AS

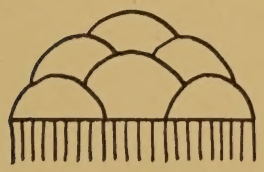
MESA VERDE
NATIONAL PARK



PHOTOGRAPHS
BY LAURA GILPIN

THE MESA VERDE NATIONAL PARK

REPRODUCTIONS FROM A SERIES OF PHOTOGRAPHS BY LAURA GILPIN



1927

COLORADO SPRINGS, COLORADO
THE GILPIN PUBLISHING COMPANY

NH
32
G489
M57
1927

THE NORTH RIM OF THE MESA VERDE

RISING in proud majesty high above the fertile Mancos and Montezuma Valleys which it dominates, the Mesa Verde commands its domain. It is unique not only for the great interest and romance of its ancient Cliff Dweller ruins, but also for the particular natural beauty of the Mesa itself. Geologically, it is an eroded table-land fifteen miles long and eight miles wide, rising from these valleys in southwestern Colorado. This table-land has been eroded into a series of canyons, twenty-six in all, which serrate the surface area. Towards the southern end the canyons deepen to a great extent, one terminating in another, expanding, blending into successive vistas of increasing grandeur. The top structure of these canyons is composed of a thick stratum of sandstone lightly covered with surface soil. This stratum forms sheer cliffs of variegated color along the top of the canyon walls. As the sandstone varies in its degree of hardness, great caves have been worn in the softer portions. In these caves the Cliff Dweller built his impregnable

THE GETTY CENTER
LIBRARY

THE MONTEZUMA VALLEY FROM THE MESA

home, hanging, as it were, high in the canyon wall, and inaccessible from the top save by a difficult trail cut into the precipitous cliff.

The visitor approaches the Mesa Verde, from its northern side. Point Lookout, the northern-most point, rises nearly two thousand feet above the valley. It looms with impressive dignity above the road which skirts its base and ascends its northern slope, a wonderful panorama spreading below, ever widening in its great sweep to the far distant horizon. From this road one sees the North Rim of the Mesa, a succession of similar promontories, jutting out into the valley like giant piers awaiting the arrival of some leviathan ship. And indeed that very ship steers its phantom course fifty miles south of the Mesa, on the vast desert sea of the Navajo reservation. This gigantic form, Shiprock, is seen in its most mysterious and beautiful aspect from the North Rim of the Mesa Verde.

On reaching the top of the Rim, one is surprised at first to find that it does not appear

THE PHANTOM SHIP OF THE DESERT

as a table-land. Instead there is a succession of valleys, which soon drop away into deep canyons, bordered by verdant, rolling hills. The whole of this portion of the Mesa is covered with buckbrush, mountain mahogany, scrub oak, pinon, juniper and cedar trees, and countless small shrubs which in the autumn produce such beauty of blended color as is seldom seen. The road winds around the head of each valley, climbing over the intervening ridge to the next one. To the south stretches the "Great Green Table" sloping to the desert. The dramatic ascent to the Mesa top is for the moment forgotten as one looks across this boundless expanse, then suddenly it is revealed again in ever-increasing splendor as the road, at the head of another canyon, comes to the precipitous edge of the Rim, and again the great sweep of the Montezuma Valley lies at one's feet. And so it continues, this road of amazing wonder, now encircling a canyon, now winding over a ridge, now skirting the edge of the great buttes high above the valley. Then suddenly it turns south-

CLIFF CANYON FROM SUN TEMPLE

ward, a gradual descent to the southern end of the Mesa, through an unbroken avenue of pinon and stately cedars where all outlook is lost until it comes to its abrupt end at the very brink of a majestic canyon.

At this terminus is Spruce Tree Camp, the center of the activities of the Park life. Here are the hotel, camping grounds, and the new government buildings recently erected by Superintendent Nusbaum. "Pueblo" in their design, and built of the same stone that was used by the Cliff Dwellers, these buildings crown the edge of Spruce Tree Canyon. The interiors are charming. Wherever possible Indian motifs have been used in decoration, and the furniture has all been made at the Park from early Spanish designs. The whole group creates an atmosphere which is uniquely concordant with the surroundings.

Interesting talks on the history and customs of these ancient peoples are given by the Superintendent and Rangers to the visitors gathered about the evening camp fire.

SUN TEMPLE

The great interest of this National Park lies in the ancient ruins, hundreds of which have been found varying in age from eight hundred to two thousand years. There are two types of ruins; those of the Pueblo type, built on the surface of the Mesa, and those of the Cliff Dweller type, built in the caves of the overhanging cliffs. Some of the larger ruins have been excavated and repaired and made accessible for the visitor, but there are many cliff dwellings in which no white man has as yet set foot. Archaeologists have unearthed pottery of all kinds, implements of bone, stone and wood, baskets, fragments of fiber-cloth and feather-robes, sandals and ceremonial relics of many forms. Corn, beans, and squash seed have been found which were the basic agricultural products of these aboriginal farmers who cultivated small tracts on the mesa top. An interesting collection of such treasures of the ancient inhabitants may be seen and studied in the Park Museum.

Many of the Cliff Dwellings have been found in a wonderful state of preservation. This is due to the fact that they were completely protected from the weather by the caves

CLIFF PALACE, THE CAMEO IN THE CLIFF

in which they were built. And as the Indians of more recent years were afraid to enter these deserted homes of their ancestors, they stood unharmed for hundreds of years until the arrival of the white men in 1888. Between that date and the creation of the National Park in 1906 many ruins suffered grievously from the hands of "pot hunters" and those who did not appreciate the great historical value of these buildings.

The atmosphere of antiquity which emanates from these age-old ruins takes possession of all who behold them. The first sight of the Spruce Tree House, from the porch of the Park Community Building, is a wonderful experience. It rests there, in its cave setting, tucked away in a small canyon, with an air of peaceful dignity, a living monument to a forgotten race. At intervals during the summer, Mrs. Nusbaum presents plays of extraordinary beauty. Using Spruce Tree House as a stage, and with the Indian employees of the Park as actors, the ruin again becomes the colorful scene of the ancient pageantry of Indian life, to the delight of the audience across the narrow canyon.

THE CITY OF THE DEAD

A WATCH TOWER OF THE ANCIENTS

SPRUCE TREE HOUSE

SQUARE TOWER HOUSE

THE CLIFF DWELLERS COUNTRY

BALCONY HOUSE

THE COOKING JAR

THE HOUSE OF THE CLIFF DWELLER

CEDAR TREES

All of the ruins were community dwellings. One family or one clan lived in each of the many smaller ruins, but it is estimated that as many as eight hundred people lived in Cliff Palace. Both types of ruins were built of stone and cemented with adobe clay. The larger Cliff Dweller ruins contain many rooms and religious or ceremonial chambers called *kivas*. The kivas are always circular in shape and are built below the ground surface, the roof generally being at that level. The roofs of both kivas and rooms were made of peeled cedar poles over which was a thick layer of cedar bark, then a covering of earth. Besides the kivas there are many rooms which were used for dwelling and storage rooms, while some of the remote rooms were mortuary chambers. In many places the dwellings are two, sometimes three and even four stories high. The interiors of the rooms were plastered with adobe and in some instances the outer wall surface also. In a few rooms the walls have been decorated with symbolic designs. There are small doorways in all of the rooms open-

AN INDIAN FIRE CEREMONY

SUNSET FROM THE NORTH RIM

ing either into the plazas, or into rooms which lie at the rear, one opening into another. Some of the doorways are T-shaped, others are rectangular, slightly narrowing at the top. A large slab of stone was used for a door. Fire places are found in some of the rooms, but most of the cooking was done in the open plaza. Special rooms have been found which had been set apart for the grinding of the corn. The stone mills consisted of boxes made of slabs of rock. In each of these was an inclined mealstone, a *metate*. The corn was placed on this and rubbed with a small rounded stone, a *mano*, until the finely ground meal fell into a receptacle at the bottom of the mill. The cliff dwellers used earthenware pots for cooking utensils as well as for water and food containers. In all of the ruins there are one or more towers, presumably watch towers, though it is believed that they were used for ceremonial purposes also. The round tower of Cliff Palace is a fine example of the skillful masonry of these aboriginal people.

THE PRAYER SENDER

Each ruin has its own individuality and charm. The locations differ greatly, and the structures are somewhat different in each. Cliff Palace, the largest ruin in the Park, is the most impressive. The majesty of its setting, the beauty of its contours and the interesting play of light and shade, make a visit to this ruin most memorable. But no less picturesque are Balcony House, Square Tower House, Spruce Tree House, and many others. Far View House is a fine example of the Pueblo type of ruin. Sun Temple, also a surface ruin, built on a point overlooking two superb canyons in one of which is Cliff Palace, is unique in its construction and shrouded with mystery. Little is actually known regarding the purpose of this ruin, though it is generally believed to have been a ceremonial building. It is shaped like a huge letter D with a double wall around the outside. In the center are two kivas. There is a legend connected with it told by the Hopi Indians of today. They believe that it was built by their ancestors. These people in their great pride considering them-

THE READING ROOM IN THE PARK MUSEUM

selves equal to their gods, invited them to occupy one of the kivas, that it might be proven who were superior. The gods in fury destroyed the temple, scattered the people to the south, and changed their languages. Thus Sun Temple, with this legend concerning the origin of the various Pueblo Indians of New Mexico and Arizona, is a prototype of the Biblical Tower of Babel.

Weeks may be spent at the Mesa Verde National Park exploring its ruins, its canyons, and enjoying the great beauty of the North Rim. There are countless trips to be made, either on horseback or on foot. From the bottom of the canyons there is endless fascination in hunting for tiny ruins hidden away in secluded corners high—hundreds of feet high—above the trail. And it must always be with a sense of romance gathered about a forgotten people, as well as with appreciation of the beauty of the country itself, that one remembers the Mesa Verde.

COVER DESIGN BY GEORGE WILLIAM EGGERS

HALFTONES BY THE BECK ENGRAVING COMPANY, NEW YORK CITY ℭ PRINTING BY THE DENTAN PRINTING COMPANY, COLORADO SPRINGS, COLORADO ℭ COPYRIGHT BY THE GILPIN PUBLISHING COMPANY, COLORADO SPRINGS, COLORADO ℭ

FROM THE ESTATE OF
LEE D. WITKIN

GETTY CENTER LIBRARY